

# Newspeak

by marc cooper

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**MURDERING THE TRUTH:** A few small TV stations have made news recently by refusing to air trash-and-flesh programming pumped out by their affiliated networks — notably NBC's *Favorite Son*, found objectionable in Indiana for excessive closeness to the reality of humanoid Dan Quayle, and CBS' *Dirty Dancing*, banned by a Utah station for being dangerously "immoral." Making substantially less news is how the same parent networks who are willing to fill six hours of prime time with the fictional story of a garter-snapping junior senator are at the same time refusing to buy, and therefore to air, two recently produced documentaries, one British and one French, that purport to prove how a real former senator, John F. Kennedy, was murdered 25 years ago by a mob-backed conspiracy. That both of these programs hew to all the rigorous standards of news documentaries, and that both have been scheduled for broadcast by just about every major network and station on the European continent, is apparently not enough to convince our own domestic programming czars that we, as an audience, are grown-up enough to watch such fare. The typical network response has been that the European docs are unacceptable because they have such a definite — and controversial — point of view. That sort of objection wasn't to be voiced, however, by the hundreds of stations, including Los Angeles' own KCOP Ch. 13, which last week aired Jack Anderson's abominable schlockfest entitled *American Expose: Who Murdered JFK?* Appearing as an overinflated and often inarticulate knock-off of Geraldo Rivera, Anderson led us through a two-hour circus of out-of-context interviews, comic-book-level dramatizations of secret meetings (gangsters in silk suits, cocktail waitresses in beehive hair-dos, Cuban security agents in dark sunglasses), all culminating in a live — yes, live! — one-on-one with the totally incoherent widow of Lee Harvey Oswald. Anderson had hyped us for an hour on the earth-shattering exclusivity of his chat with Marina, only so we could discover — once she was on camera — that he was simply coaxing her to reiterate a string of ambiguities that she had told to the *Ladies' Home Journal* several months earlier. By the time the shoddily produced show ended, Anderson thought he had "proven" that an amalgam of anti- and pro-Castro gangsters had hit JFK. Actually, he lost me halfway through his twisted trail of sensationalist conjecture. As to his question of who murdered JFK, we still don't know. But American television is guilty of smothering two serious and earnest attempts to find out, while simultaneously reducing one of the most traumatic events in recent U.S. history to 120 minutes of insulting "infotainment." Look out for an Anderson-anchored series entitled *Assassination Tonight*, co-hosted by Mariette Hartley. Unless Fawn Hall is still out of jail and available.

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**FISHY FOCUS:** Fortunately, the election is now over and TV news executives can finally get back to those truly important stories pushed off the tube by that necessary but boring monthlong series of two-hour specials on both candidates' programmatic proposals on health care, education, the environment, women's issues, economic restructuring, Central America, the Middle East, and South Africa. And have some compassion for Brokaw, Jennings and Rather, who were forced — on behalf of the national interest — to spend hours on the tube this week walking us through the final moments of the Bush-Dukakis campaign, when all three of them, and all 250 million of us, were really dying to know about the one story that had been dropped like a hot potato: whatever happened to those two California gray whales that had been trapped in the Bering Sea? Latest cable reports say they have defected to the Soviet Union. "After watching the farcical election campaign back at home, we felt we had no choice," said Mike, the larger of the two aquatic mammals. "Anyway, after the U.S. Coast Guard failed to free us after two weeks, it was the glorious Soviet navy that finally liberated us," explained George, the other whale. "You know, TV is also better here," George snorted before diving below the icy Russian waters. Both mammals said that they would consider coming back home in four or maybe eight more years, but only if KTLA reporter Warren Wilson promises to escort them to safety. ■